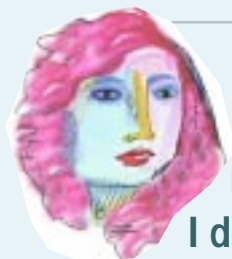

What if ovarian cancer runs in my family?

An inherited risk of ovarian cancer can be passed through either the father's or mother's side of the family. It may be caused by a defect in a gene that keeps tumors from growing.

Ask your relatives if any women in your family have had ovarian, breast, or colon cancer. (In some cases the risk for these cancers is linked.) If there is a family history, be sure to tell your gynecologist. You may need to be checked more often.

If there is ovarian cancer in my family, what can I do to protect myself?

Bring the information about your family history to your gynecologist or a gynecologic oncologist (a doctor who specializes in ovarian, vaginal, or uterine cancer). Depending on your risk, you may be advised to be checked every six months. If you are at very high risk, are over 35, and have completed your family, your doctor may advise you to have your ovaries surgically removed before they show any signs of disease.



I have no history of ovarian cancer in my family. What can I do to protect myself?

All women, regardless of their risk, should have regular rectovaginal pelvic examinations throughout their lives.

Talk to your doctor about oral contraceptives (birth control pills). Some studies suggest that they protect against ovarian cancer.

Avoid the use of powders (talc or cornstarch-based) and feminine deodorant sprays around your vaginal area.

Try to limit your fat intake.

Where can I get more information about ovarian cancer?

If you have a family history or other genetic concerns related to ovarian cancer, you can call the Gilda Radner Familial Ovarian Cancer Registry. The registry is named in honor of comedienne Gilda Radner, who died of ovarian cancer in 1989. Registry support staff offer advice and help for women who may be at risk for the disease. The number is 1-800-OVARIAN.

For referral to a genetic counselor with expertise in cancer risk assessment and counseling, call the New York State Department of Health's Bureau of Chronic Disease Services at (518) 474-1222.

For general information on ovarian cancer or any other form of cancer, call the National Cancer Institute at 1-800-4-CANCER.

For a referral to gynecologic oncologists in your area, call the American Society of Clinical Oncology at (703) 299-0150 or the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation at 1-800-444-4441.

For a list of ovarian cancer symptoms and risk factors, or to be put in touch with an ovarian cancer survivor in your area, call the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition toll-free at 1-888-682-7426 (1-888-OVARIAN). This is a national organization of ovarian cancer survivors who are working for increased awareness of ovarian cancer among the general public.

State of New York
George E. Pataki, Governor
Department of Health
Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner

Ovarian cancer



What

You

Need

to

Know



Ovarian cancer can develop in one or both ovaries. About 1 in 55 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer in their lifetime (compared with 1 in 9 diagnosed with breast cancer). However, because it is often not discovered until it has spread beyond the ovary, it is the fourth leading cause of cancer death among women (after lung, breast, and colon cancer).

What are the risks for ovarian cancer?

A family history of ovarian cancer: Having a relative with ovarian cancer increases a woman's risk of getting it herself. Generally, the closer the relative, the greater the risk. However, only about 10% of all ovarian cancers can be linked to a family history of the disease.

Breast cancer: Women who have had breast cancer are twice as likely to develop ovarian cancer.

No pregnancies: Women who have not been pregnant are more likely to develop ovarian cancer.

Possible risks: One study suggests that women who have taken the fertility drug clomiphene citrate (Clomid) **may** have an increased risk of ovarian cancer. Other possible risks being studied are a diet high in fat; exposure to asbestos; and the use of talc (a mineral substance found in talcum powder) near the vaginal area.



What are the symptoms of ovarian cancer?

Often there are no symptoms until the disease has spread throughout the abdomen. Even then, the symptoms are often vague and can be confused with other conditions. They include:

- Feeling bloated;
- Abdominal discomfort and/or backaches;
- Gas or indigestion that can't otherwise be explained;
- A feeling of fullness, even after a light meal;
- Nausea or loss of appetite;
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing;
- Pain during sexual intercourse;
- Change in menstrual flow;
- Feeling tired;
- Slight fever.

As the tumor grows, it can cause pressure on other organs and may cause frequent urination, constipation and weight change. However, these symptoms can also be caused by fibroids and other non-cancerous conditions.

Are there tests for ovarian cancer?

There is no single test. If a woman has ovarian cancer in her family history, or if she is having symptoms, she should be checked with a combination of tests. They include:

- A rectovaginal pelvic exam, so the doctor can feel if there is any mass or growth in the abdomen. The doctor will insert one finger into your vagina and one finger into your rectum and press down on your abdomen with the other hand.
- A transvaginal sonogram (also called an ultrasound). This painless test uses sound waves to check for growths inside the pelvis.
- A CA-125 test. CA-125 is a substance often found in the blood and urine of women with ovarian cancer. However, other, non-cancerous conditions can also cause an increase in CA-125, so a cancer diagnosis cannot be made from this test alone.